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SUBJECT: MAKING THE MOST OF USG ASSISTANCE TO MUSLIM  
COMMUNITIES

¶1. Dan: During your recent visit you rightly pointed out that the USG could do a lot to get value, on a global level, from our outreach and assistance to the Muslim communities in this part of the world. I took note of the enthusiasm with which you greeted news of our planned project to rebuild the historic mosque in Nis which was severely damaged in communal violence in 2004. We will be sure to report this widely. In the meantime, I wanted to highlight some of our recent successes we have already achieved with our assistance to the Muslim community here, part of our larger policy objective of a Serbia that is a stable, multiethnic, multi-religious state. I hope to be able to integrate our programs into a broader Muslim outreach strategy for Europe.

#### USG ASSISTANCE TO ISLAMIC COMMUNITY

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¶2. We have just completed a partial \$100,000 reconstruction of the Islamic Community Center (ICC), attached to the Bajrakli mosque (Belgrade's only mosque.) The Bajrakli mosque, which was damaged in 2004, has served the Islamic community of Belgrade for hundreds of years - it claims to be the oldest building in Belgrade, rivaling Kalemegdan, and the community center has long served as a gathering place. The renovated center will serve as a place where community members, especially young people and women, can come to improve their computer literacy, internet and foreign language knowledge, and get the skills that will help them with future job prospects.

¶3. I also awarded \$50,000 from my Fund for Cultural Preservation last year for the rebuilding of a historic Muslim building in Novi Pazar in the Muslim-majority Sandzak region. The building houses a mehteb, or Islamic elementary school - the oldest one in the Balkans. The project is ongoing, and expected to be completed this summer.

¶4. On the economic side, beginning in 2006, we began work with Mufti Hamdija Jusufspahic and his son Imam Mustafa Jusufspahic, who identified the village of Banatski Brestovac, on the outskirts of Belgrade, to successfully implement two agricultural projects: construction of greenhouses, and support for a beef/dairy farm. USAID procured the greenhouses, an irrigation system and gave over \$12,000 in matching funds for seed, fertilizer and labor. The project centers on assisting Muslim vegetable farmers to boost production, farm sales, and income by forming a modern marketing association, adopting modern technology, using business planning, and doubling the length of the growing season with greenhouse donations.

¶5. We also gave \$75,000 (30 cattle and technical

assistance) along with over \$13,000 in matching funds to bolster Halal beef and dairy production in the village. This project expands production, establishing a medium-sized (60 head) facility for Simmental cattle designed for "dual purpose" dairy and beef production. The Muslim Association of Serbia has subsequently rented a larger dairy beef production facility in the nearby village of Policica.

#### OTHER OUTREACH TO THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

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¶6. The Embassy has made it a priority to target our outreach and PD programs to the Muslim communities in Serbia both in the Sandzak and in the Albanian Muslim-majority Presevo Valley. Our American Corner in Vranje and American Window in Bujanovac provide footholds for our exchange programs and other PD strategies for engaging these communities. U.S. Speaker programs and Democracy Commission grants have both been focused on the Islamic communities, which have helped both our PD efforts and raised local political awareness. In general, we make an effort to include students and children from the Sandzak and Presevo Valley in our exchange programs wherever possible. An American Corner is planned for Novi Pazar to increase our outreach capabilities.

¶7. Especially noteworthy are also our annual Iftar dinners, which include Muslim leaders from the Presevo Valley and both of Serbia's Islamic factions (from the Sandzak and Belgrade), as well as Ambassadors to Serbia from Islamic countries. We have hosted additional Iftars in Novi Pazar itself to include a broader range of Muslim spiritual and civic leaders in the Sandzak. This outreach has become extraordinarily popular locally, has resulted in

numerous invitations for us to attend other Embassy Iftars, and has drawn most of Serbia's Muslim leaders closer to us -- they participated in our 9/11 anniversary commemoration, where they offered a prayer for our victims that they later made available to the public.

¶8. Also, USG International Visitor Programs have included Serbian Muslim spiritual leaders and we hope to expand this to include both the Belgrade (Mufti and Imam Jufuspahic) and Novi Pazar Islamic leadership.

#### IMPACT

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¶9. Through frequent visits by POL, PD, AID and the Front Office, the Embassy remains engaged in the local and national aspects of politics both in the Sandzak and Presevo Valley. Our efforts in Novi Pazar have resulted in an open and productive relationship with both the political and spiritual leaders. This pays dividends when we need to react quickly to incidents such as the murder of a poll worker in Novi Pazar or the seizure of a Wahabbist arms cache near Sijenica recently. We work with Albanian political leaders to encourage them to sustain their participation in the Serbian political process at both the local and the national level. Our Get Out the Vote effort in advance of the January 2007 national elections illustrated the success of our engagement -- not only was there record turnout in the Muslim communities, but the Presevo Valley Albanians participated for the first time in a decade and successfully elected one member of parliament to represent them in Belgrade.

¶10. I am extremely proud of the engagement program our team here has conceived and implemented in a relatively short time, and I think it is having a real impact on our relations with and support for moderate Muslims in this corner of Europe. I wanted to bring these ongoing and planned programs to your attention in the hope that EUR will find some use of our actions in our broader Muslim outreach strategy. We stand ready to pitch in wherever we

can to do the most good.

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